



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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HOME LIFE.

I HEARD the objects of the P.N.E.U. defined the other day as "to teach parents how to obey their children." This was, of course, satire, but there was a grain of truth in it and that is why I consider "A Mother's Letter" one of the most helpful articles which has lately appeared in the *Parents' Review*. It deals with home life from a point of view usually ignored by the new educationalists, and relegates the children I think to their proper place in the home. We members of the P.N.E.U. acknowledge "that the business of life is the formation of character," and we also will readily acknowledge, I imagine, that our own characters have been more truly formed by the sorrows and denials, the self sacrifice of our home life than by anything else. Are we right if we deny our children this mental tonic? I think not. The old method *did* turn out "free, noble men, sweet and well disciplined women." The heroes and heroines of the world have not been those as a rule who were their parents' first object in life. I thank "A Mother" for her frank avowal "that she used to hate teaching," and "that to be much with the children was a distinct effort of duty." I married at an age when every girl has a keen enjoyment in society amusement and also intellectual work, and at first all these seemed entirely swamped by ill-health, the care of babies, and domestic details which I hated.

This Society is anxious that we should give each other the benefit of our experiences. To do this one becomes unavoidably egotistical, but still, I will give some of mine. First then, I think every woman should carry on her own intellectual education and endeavour to keep herself in some way abreast of current thought. This can only be done by reading, certain steady hard reading, which is an effort and sometimes an impossibility to arrange for in the day. Good lectures are within the reach of everyone near a town, and give an impetus to study and thought. It is a good

plan, too, to rub up any subject in which we were good at school, for it delights and rather astonishes the children to find we can give them valuable help when they are ready to take up that subject. Secondly, society has great and pressing claims on us, which for husband's and children's sake we must not neglect. A wife's first duty is to her husband, and to fulfil it she must be ready to comprehend and sympathise with his pursuits, to entertain and amuse his friends. But all this means, in a sense, time taken from the children; it means that we must so arrange our time and theirs that they are suitably occupied while we are free. I think most women do too much needlework. You often hear them say "Oh, I have no time for reading, I make all the children's clothes." This, like the mending basket, which in books always accompanied the devoted mother, is surely a sign of bad management. I also make all my children's things, and with the help of a good needle-woman it takes me exactly one week in the spring, and the same time in the autumn. The nurse can do the mending one day a week, and if in a large family it accumulates, there are always poor women who, for a very moderate charge, do in a day what it would take many hours of a busy mother's time to accomplish. I believe, too, in the old days of nursery life, and like "a mother" I think of what my own mother used to do. In my own home we were a great deal left to ourselves. My mother, though she directed and overlooked everything, was too delicate to have us much with her. It seems to me now she must have been very "previous" in her educational theories. We were educated at home for more than nine years by one of the best and cleverest women it was ever my lot to meet (who by the way I do not fancy held any certificates), and by classes at a school near, but the great boon of our lives was the leisure. We had time to think, to play, to prepare our work our own way and above all to read. I don't know what we did not read! except that we had none of the literature written *down* to children with which the modern nursery is swamped.

Now, I think, children are being "drawn out" too much, they are not left to themselves enough to develop originality. Even their amusements are directed and must have a method in them. I have never even attempted to amuse my children

and it would be hard to beat them for pure imagination. They are always busy and happy and never ask what they can do next. What they do ask always is, "Is there nothing we can do to help you, mother?"

I have a great dislike to games containing diluted science; a sort of watered down Kindergarten. Do let us leave the children a little pure nonsense, it is so good for them! Our nursery was our castle to which we only admitted "grown-ups" on sufferance. There we played, acted, experimented, and occasionally fought, unmolested and unchecked except by the nurse, who, I believe, lived in our family over thirty years, and ruled us despotically. Absolute obedience to all rules was insisted on: we were never consulted as to our likes and dislikes as so many children are now, by parents who never consider how soon it ages children to have to legislate for themselves. The memory of that old nurse, who lived to nurse my boys, compels me to write on a point on which I feel strongly, namely, that in homes where the mother does direct her nursery and schoolroom the lady nurse is a mistake. Of course, when she is prevented from doing so it is right a lady should take her place, but in having no one but ladies near our children (rather a point with the P.N.E.U., is it not?) I think we miss a Christ-like touch in our children's lives—personal sympathy with the lower classes. Of course, a lady will superintend mending the toys and making scrap-books for hospitals, but after all, these are only a form of "charity" not the *touch* of sympathy which alone ever has or ever will do anything to lift up this world of ours. How much more do our children learn of the lives of the poor when it is their nurse's little delicate sister who inherits their cast-off clothes and appreciates the dolls they dress, or when the boys discover the cook's brother, who has no pocket money and must make everything himself, keeps poultry, rabbits or pigeons, much more successfully than they; or when they *know* the family to whom the Christmas dinner goes and can ask whether the pudding was good and the crackers funny which *they* denied themselves to give. "Blessed with a dear home life yourselves purify and gladden poor homes around. The great hope for Society is that the influence of pure and noble home life may descend and flow through all the squalid, wretched households. A Christian household ill comprehends

its vocation if it is not training the boys and girls which grow up in it to be wise as well as devoted ministers to the poor." Children cannot go among the poor, but through the maids who are part of their home they can gain some insight into less favoured lives than theirs. I think we should make our servants feel *one* with us—that we cannot do without them. Choose nice girls, insist on "obedience without argument" (an ideal motto for the nursery), allow them a few faults, sympathise with their monotonous lives and above all appeal to them for help in the care and training of the young lives which are partly in their care. Believe me, they will readily respond to confidence put in them, and in correcting the children's faults they will check their own. I grant one has disappointments. Perfect characters are rare and our own friends sometimes grieve us, but I know from experience that it often results in years of faithful, loving service.

After all we cannot idealise our children. They are not angels, but future men and women; souls who have eternity to perfect themselves. We all would like to keep them ignorant as well as innocent of evil, but we cannot. Our boys must go out into the world and fight the evil that is "around" *not in* them, and we know that it is to him that "overcometh" that the crown of life is promised. I think, too, that we do not enough insist on gratitude in our children. "Only noble natures can be grateful," and many modern children seem to take all kindness as their right and occasionally even patronise their parents. The father should be the centre of the home. He works for it, denies himself many pleasures that the children may have all, and the children should feel this. A walk or a romp with the father, an hour's talk with the mother, should be an honour as well as a pleasure. The children should realise that the parent thus devoting himself to them might well be amusing himself another way. It makes me *so* happy when people say, "I love to give your children pleasure, they are always so grateful," or when my sisters tell me, "If we give your children the smallest present they thank us so warmly we always feel nothing could possibly have pleased them more." A holiday here is high festival, and the children have a hundred ways of planning out their father's time, but graciously allow that I have the first right to his society,

and give me part of the day to have him "all to myself," a privilege we both enjoy! If it is "more blessed to give than to receive," it is surely a gift to be able to receive graciously.

In conclusion, let me quote again from that beautiful book, "The Home Life."* "One chief element of the parental art is judicious and timely confidence. The best preparation for the burden and struggle of life is the knowledge, in some wise measure, of what it costs the elders to live, in the highest sense—effort, patience, hope. But even about the lower things of life confidence is not wasted. Boys and girls are content to know their parents manage to live somehow. Their daily bread and pleasures come to them as the sunlight comes; they know nothing of the dust and sweat of the battle that wins them. It is well that as intelligence unfolds, the young people should know something of what the comfort and order of the home costs—something of what the father and mother talk over, with broken voices and clasped hands sometimes, when the children have left them and the cares of the day are done—that they may not think that life is quite a holiday pastime, and may see that the noblest thing man has to do in this world is to toil patiently and suffer bravely, that others may be housed, clothed, fed and trained for God. Why is it children so frequently find it easier to open their hearts to strangers than to those who are set in their homes to be to them in the place of God? Make them your comrades, as Christ made His disciples, opening to them your heart of hearts as their nature unfolds; while at the same time see that you share their sports and pastimes, and keep your interest keen in all their pleasures and pursuits; taking as much of your own boyhood and girlhood as you can on with you through life."

A. F. S.

* "The Home Life," by Baldwin, Brown, Smith, Elder & Co.

ON SELF-CULTURE.

BY J. SAXON MILLS.

THE meaning of the word "self" in the title of my lecture, is, of course, not to be limited to any single one or two of those faculties into which we are accustomed arbitrarily, but conveniently, to divide our human nature. Carlyle has strongly insisted upon the capital error involved in speaking of a man's intellectual nature, and of his moral nature, as if these were divisible and existed apart. Necessities of language, however, as he admits, prescribe such forms of utterance, so that I may divide also the functions of self-culture broadly into those which relate to a man's intellectual, moral or physical nature. Much, indeed, might be said about physical, and still more about moral culture, but here, of course, I can only speak in any way approaching adequacy about one of these great provinces, and I have chosen that of our intellectual culture. One of my chief contentions, however, is that unless intellectual culture conduces to the healthy and effective conduct of life, or in other words, to moral culture, it can be regarded only as an innocent pastime, and scarcely part of a man's serious and imperative duty.

Now, to begin with, what definition of education shall we adopt? Are we to say, as much that passes nowadays for education might justify us in saying, that its main object is to enable us to pay a certain toll, called an examination, which often, without much reference to individual capacity, bars the entrance to many walks of life? or shall we follow a recent writer in one of our great monthlies, who seemed to think education chiefly valuable as a creator and bulwark of social distinctions, so that we may have a kind of aristocracy of opportunity lifted above the mass of self-educated plebeians? Such conceptions, though not unjustified by our existing system, we must of course repudiate, and find some definition, not only scientifically adequate, but helpful to us in the practical pursuit of the object defined. Such a definition has been given once and for all, in English literature, by one who was the type and embodiment of the highest